



A Supervisory Newsletter from the Employee Advisory Service

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

The Employee Assistance Program to help you manage your most valuable resource— Employees

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Website: <http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ Q. I finally confronted my employee about his temper, and he agreed to do something about it. He has information about an anger management class and promised to go. I'm proud of him. He is motivated and is doing the right thing. So, is a referral to EAS necessary?

A. Although your employee appears motivated to do something constructive about his anger, you should still encourage him to take advantage of EAS. There may be other explanations for his angry behavior, and EAS could help identify them. For example, if his anger issues were a symptom of another problem like alcoholism, an anger management class alone would have little lasting effect. Many illnesses could explain a volatile temper, including depression, neurological disorders, and a variety of untreated or improperly managed diseases and health conditions. Approving of your employee's plan reinforces his pursuit of a course of action that may not work. Not making a supervisor referral to EAS based upon the unacceptable behavior may contribute to his behavior problem getting worse, a delay in obtaining proper help, and other risks associated with his performance and behavior.

■ Q. I caught my employee taking office supplies for personal use. Most employees take a pen or two, but he had a load of stuff. He has a part-time business, and I think this explains it. I warned him, but should I involve EAS?

A. Your employee is stealing, but what explains his behavior is something you cannot determine. It is safe to say that most employees with part-time businesses do not use their employers to meet their office supply needs. So there is probably an explanation to his stealing supplies other than the convenience of a supply closet at work. Your employee may never steal again after you confront his behavior, but making an EAS referral is still a good move. There may be unusual reasons for your employee's behavior. For example, he may have a mental health problem associated with compulsive behavior and guilt. In this instance, your confrontation may generate a crisis that will facilitate his accepting help. Ultimately, a referral to EAS may keep your employee from losing his job, since most agencies have little tolerance for employees who steal.

■ Q. When I asked my administrative assistant to explain his declining job performance, he disclosed that he is being treated for an "anxiety illness." But he also said I contribute to it because of the way I supervise. What should I do?

A. Your employee has disclosed a health condition that may be covered by the Americans With Disabilities Act. Be sure to consult with your Human Resources Consultant (HRC) to obtain guidance on your organization's policies in responding to this situation. Follow your agency guidelines to determine what accommodations would be helpful in his work situation to permit him to perform his duties satisfactorily. If they are reasonable, consider implementing them. Also discuss your employee's concerns about your supervision. Making changes in the way you supervise may be necessary, particularly if they could also be considered reasonable. Once you have accommodated your employee, you can revisit the evaluation of his performance. Consider whether a supervisor referral to EAS is indicated by continuing problems, and what to do if performance does not improve. Remember that your EA Professional is there to support you in going through this process, too.

■ Q. I know the signs and symptoms of an employee who could become violent, but what can managers do to reduce the possibility of an emotional and hostile reaction from an employee?

A. Much is written about the signs and symptoms of an employee who may become violent at work. Less is published about the role supervisors can play in helping prevent an employee from responding emotionally to an incident at work with rage and violence. Be a good listener as a supervisor, and do not avoid troubled employees. Do not resist being a sounding board for employees who are upset about perceived injustices and how they are treated by the organization or coworkers. When handling conflicts between two employees, demonstrate neutrality toward the goal of helping resolve conflict. Keep the emphasis on problem solving, not who is right or wrong. Keep control of your own emotions. Don't make a problem worse by demonstrating aggressive behavior or using angry, abusive, or emotional language that a potentially violent employee may model or escalate. If you struggle with how to manage a troubled employee, consult with the EAP. This is another situation where EAS can be a very useful tool for the supervisor or manager.

■ Q. When an EAP helps our organization salvage an employee and prevent turnover, how much money does it save the company? I have heard turnover costs are high, but what do they include?

A. According to the American Management Association (AMA) two-thirds of managers surveyed in a research study were unable to calculate the cost of a lost position. AMA says the cost of turnover can vary greatly - from a few thousands dollars for the lowest wage earner to between \$75,000 and \$100,000 for a top executive. Estimates of turnover costs range from 25 percent to almost 200 percent of the employee's annual compensation. Costs that are more difficult to estimate, but can often be easily seen and felt, include service disruption, emotional costs, loss of morale, burnout/absenteeism among remaining employees, loss of experience, continuity, and "corporate memory." The U.S. Department of Labor says that businesses should count on turnover costing an amount equal to one-third of the compensation for the position.

NOTES:

Visit EAS on our website at:
<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

